



Learning Through Teacher Study Groups

Why go this route?

- Because learning is a social activity. Teacher Study Groups provide an outlet for teachers to collaborate within professional learning communities.
- Because Teacher Study Groups can organize, document and evaluate change.
- Because (as Bruce Wellman notes in The Adaptive School) developing a staff's capacity for talking together may be the most significant investment faculties can make for student learning.
- Because this will help staff work toward their National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification.

You'll know you've arrived when...

- Self-selected, multi-content or grade-level teacher teams are engaged in self-determined project-based learning and/or problem-based initiatives throughout the school.
- Staff members participating in study groups express an increased sense of collegial support.
- Study groups have published their projects as a means of documenting and validating their work.
- Changes in student achievement can be traced to what teachers are learning and doing in study groups.
- Staff members participating in study groups receive professional development credit from your school district.

Construction Zone

Relationships matter. Schools contemplating starting Teacher Study Groups as a professional development initiative should devote significant time to developing trusting relationships before undertaking this work.

Some buildings need to negotiate with their districts to manage their own professional development time.



It's about TIME

- Teacher study groups last the entire school year.
- Organizing time could take place at an August retreat.
- Weekly study group meetings should be scheduled for 1 hour.
- Year-end celebrations are often planned to coincide with other annual events like year-end Parent-Teacher conferences.
- Schedule 2-4 hours to address the Protocol for Awarding Professional Development Credit for Teacher Study Groups.




Potential COSTS

- Study groups may invite expert speakers whose fees vary from \$500-\$3000. Other study groups are usually invited.
- Copies will likely be needed.

The Process

*A step-by-step guide to
developing Teacher Study
Groups for professional
development.*

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 Establish a framework for teacher study groups.

Use INSERT A for Step 1 to explain the rationale for doing professional development in this way. Discuss pro's and con's with staff members and determine their willingness to assume the additional responsibility for self-directed learning. INSERT B for Step 1 outlines roles and responsibilities for various participants and may help build a realistic picture of the level of initiative and mutual accountability involved.

2 Allot time for staff to form teams.

Because the structure of these teams is so self-directed, it is important that the process for joining a study group be voluntary, once the decision to use this approach has been taken. INSERT for Step 2 offers one process for self-organization.

3 Outline the structure of a typical study group meeting and preview how it will change over time.

INSERT A for Step 3 outlines a sequence of goals for the first six meetings. Each group agrees to this schedule or adapts it to its own sense of how it wants to move forward. An essential component of the approach is that each meeting ends with a collaborative filling out of the "Log" (See INSERT B for Step 3).

4 Practice writing a Study Group Action Plan.

INSERT for Step 4 is an Action Plan template. Each group should develop its own plan. Encourage groups to take enough time to do this thoroughly. For instance, if they are not clear about data (what would indicate need or what would be evidence of success) taking time to establish that firmly will help guide and focus the work of further meetings.

5 Schedule weekly 1-hour sessions for the study groups to meet.

Some schools involved in the Teacher Study Group process have negotiated a waiver of contractual staff meetings scheduled by the district in order to pilot study groups as an acceptable alternative.

6 Form a site-based network for communication and support of your school-wide Teacher Study Groups.

This Instructional Council (IC) coordinates whole faculty sharing and celebrations as well as identifying common instructional concerns. IC members include the principal, three focus team or leadership team members, and one representative from each study group.

7 Establish a school/district protocol for awarding professional development credit to study group participants for their learning experiences.

INSERT for Step 7 offers a format for asserting and demonstrating learnings for evaluation. Consider offering to publish conclusions developed by groups as a part of this culminating process and as a way of developing "evidence" of learning.

8 Celebrate success!

Plan a formal exhibition to showcase products developed as a result of work done by the study groups.

Getting more mileage from School-wide Teacher Study Groups

*How using Teacher Study Groups as an approach
to professional development benefits your school
in regard to the following initiatives:*

MI-Plan

- Step 6, pages 36-37, 48-50, *Professional Development Calendar and Evaluation*. MI-Plan offers a calendar to align the yearly staff development plan with the school's action plan. Included in this process are: dates, activity, related skill, person responsible, costs, and timeline.

Education YES!

- Indicators of Instructional Quality include professional development and extended learning opportunities. Use this packet as a systematic way of inviting staff members to explore research that can positively impact student achievement and school improvement efforts.



Resources

Books

***The Adaptive School:
A Sourcebook for Developing
Collaborative Groups***

**Bruce Wellman and Robert Garmston.
Christopher Gordon, 1999.**

Because schools, like other organizations and organisms, must adapt or perish, this book offers tools, approaches and practices that can build flexibility, creativity, and collaboration in the continual dance of improvement and change.

***An ASCD Study Guide for
Energizing Teacher Education &
Professional Development With
Problem-Based Learning***

Levin, B. ASCD. Alexandria, VA 2001.

The very first chapter tackles the question of "They expect teachers to do WHAT?" The author sees this as a way for teachers to take ownership of their profession.

Platicas for Teachers

**ATLAS Communities. Education
Development Center, Newton, MA.**

These catalysts for teacher-to-teacher connections come from a Spanish word for "chat."

People

Specialists

Most Intermediate School Districts have a specialist working with schools on professional development in their service areas.

Coaches

The *Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools* website lists coaches whose training has been provided by Michigan State University and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. Some are experienced in school improvement implementation in Michigan schools. Please visit:

www.abcscoaches.org

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Websites

**[www.enc.org/professional/
guide/strategies/case](http://www.enc.org/professional/guide/strategies/case)**

Professional Development:
By our Own Design. In *Cases*,
Carne Barnett examines case-
based professional development,
using real-world examples of
teaching as a springboard for
teacher discussion.

**[education.gld.gov.au/teach-
ing/development/qtp/action/
celebrations](http://education.gld.gov.au/teaching/development/qtp/action/celebrations)**

Stories of learning communities
who've taken innovative learning
and development journeys. Click
on RESOURCES link of the Cel-
ebrations page for extensive links
to teacher-written proposals for
study groups.

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